

## Last Days of Persecution

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orders had been misunderstood by his provincial governors would deceive no one. He had been the shrewdest enemy with whom the Church had had to cope; his edict of recantation was read with chilly suspicion or cold contempt, which was changed into hymns of rejoicing when the Christians heard that the tyrant had poisoned himself and died in agony, while his conqueror, Licinius, had drowned the fallen Empress in the Orontes and put to death her child-rcn, a boy of eight and a girl of seven. Those who had suffered persecution for ten years may be pardoned their exultation that there was no one left: alive to perpetuate the names of their persecutors.\* Throughout this time the West had escaped very lightly. Even Maxentius had begun his reign by seeking to secure the good-will of the Christians. Eusebius, indeed, makes the incredible statement f that in order to please and (latter the Roman people lie pretended to embrace the Christian faith and "assumed the mask of piety." Probably all he did was to leave the Christians of Rome in peace. The chair of St. Peter had remained empty for four years after the death of Bishop Marellinus. In 308 Mar-cellus was elected to fill it and the Church was organised afresh. But it was rent with internal dissensions. There was a large section which insisted that the brethren who had been found weak during the recent persecution should be received back into

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